

# Potomac Heritage Trail

## Parks As Classrooms

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Potomac Heritage  
National Scenic Trail



## Changing Landscapes of the Potomac: A Framework for Curriculum Development and On-Site Education



### Opportunities for Educational Development

The Potomac River is more than a geographical feature within the landscape of the Mid-Atlantic region: The layers of history along the River are accessible, prominent, and changing. In particular, the triangle formed by the City of Alexandria, Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, and sites managed by The Accokeek Foundation at Piscataway Park are rich with interpretive and educational opportunities. This resource guide seeks to facilitate an educational experience of this region and promote institutional communication among sites along this stretch of the River.



This guide emphasizes sites that are accessible by boat from the Potomac River. Through most of history, the Potomac River has been one of the most reliable transportation arteries in the region. Here, one can imagine places and events before interstate highways and the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge. Public boat launching sites are prominent, while many programs at specific sites are seasonal.

### Educational Needs, Challenges and Opportunities

As the Potomac River has become cleaner over the last 50 years, the demand for, and existence of, physical access has increased. With improved access, lesson plans can be developed to focus on the following educational themes:

- Native American Communities and the Potomac
- Tobacco, Slavery, and the Potomac
- Industry on the Potomac: The Industrial Revolution and Its Legacy

These themes address a number of history and social studies “standards of learning” (SOL) goals in Maryland and Virginia. For example, “Native American Communities and the Potomac,” can be used to address Maryland’s SOL for grades 3, 4, and 5 by emphasizing the use of primary sources (e.g., Captain John Smith’s map of the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay) and by focusing on the indigenous Powhatan nation, culture and settlements. The focus on the Powhatan also complies with Virginia’s SOL for grade 2 as well as the “Virginia Studies” portion of the curriculum. For older students, an exercise in analyzing the primary documents and comparing them with secondary sources and site visits would satisfy Virginia’s VUS.1 (A, B, C, D, G, and H) and GOVT.1 (A, B, C, D, and E).

The theme of “Tobacco, Slavery, and the Potomac” focuses on the interaction among the regional tobacco economy, the environment of the Potomac River, and the experiences of enslaved Africans and African Americans. Some primary and many secondary sources are used to give an impression of slavery's impact on the landscape and the lives of different groups of people in the region. The “Industry on the Potomac” theme provides a window to look at the historical precursors to and environmental consequences of the Industrial Revolution in the region. The sites and resources outlined under this theme suggest a means for history teachers to form a cooperative lesson plan with their colleagues in physical and environmental sciences.

Organized by theme, teachers could address the following history and social studies SOL:

- Native American Communities and the Potomac:  
Virginia: VS.2.C, D, E; VUS.1.A, B, C, D, G, H; GOVT.1.A, B, C, D, E  
Maryland: Social Studies.3.History.2.a; Social Studies.4.History.1; Social Studies.5.History.1
- Tobacco, Slavery, and the Potomac:  
Virginia: VS.4.A, B; USI.3.B, USI.5.A, B, C, D; WHII.4.E (triangular trade)  
Maryland: Social Studies.4.History.2.c, 3.a, 4.b; Social Studies.5.History.3.c, d; Social Studies.8.History.8.b
- Industry on the Potomac: The Industrial Revolution and its Legacy:  
Virginia: VS.9.A; WHII.8.A, C; VUS.8.B  
Maryland: Social Studies.8.History.5.a, c; United States History.1.2.1, 3.2.3, 5.2.1, 5.2.2

Information about developing lesson plans using historic sites can be found on the website “Teaching with Historic Places” by the National Park Service: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/>; the site also includes many lesson plans organized by various criteria, including site locations and “National Standards for History and Social Studies.”

The Social Studies Department of Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland) also identifies local sites organized by topic/curriculum unit; see <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/socialstd/fieldtrips/unit.html>. Each suggested site has logistical information for planning visits and include potential student activity plans.

The National Capital Region, National Park Service, has a page that provides links to Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia and Washington, D.C., SOL; see <http://www.nps.gov/ncro/educ/sol.htm>.

The SOL for Washington, D.C., public schools were being restructured at the time this document was being written. In the future, curriculum guidelines will be available at <http://www.k12.dc.us/dcps/curriculum/curriculum1.html>.

### **Native American Communities on the Potomac**

The Potomac served as an important means of transportation and as an important source of food for native American communities in the region. Geological features such as mountains and rivers shaped, in part, the boundaries of the Powhatan confederation. The River served as an artery for commerce and trade between different settlements.

#### **Resources:**

Stephen R. Potter, *Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs: The Development of Algonqian Culture in the Potomac Valley* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1993).

*Close Encounters of the First Kind, 1585-1767*. Maryland State Archives: Documents for the Classroom.

The “Guide to Documents” contains early and modern interpretations of Native American life in the region. Also contains images from the accounts of early European explorers of the Potomac region. The “Suggested Readings” list is fairly detailed, with scholarly sources pertaining to daily life, first contact, and subsequent interactions. See

<http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000017/000000/html/00000001.html>.

Virginia / discovered and discribed by Captayn John Smith, 1606; graven by William Hole. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA. A much larger, higher resolution image of John Smith’s famous map— available for download online:

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3880.ct000377>.

Rountree, Helen C. *The Powhatan Indians: Their Traditional Culture*. 1989. University of Oklahoma Press.

Rountree, Helen C. *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries*.

Both of these books provide in-depth looks at the cultures of the Algonquin-speaking groups that are collectively called the “Powhatan Indians” of Virginia.

Grymes, Charles A. “Virginia Places”. 1998. <http://www.virginiaplaces.org/>. An incredibly detailed website created for a class at George Mason University. The focus of the website is on Virginia geography, but the section on the “ ‘Indians’ of Virginia” (<http://www.virginiaplaces.org/nativeamerican/index.html>) provides an interesting overview of the history of Virginia’s native peoples from the first “paleo-Indians” to modern tribal groups. There are many good links and images, but the personal opinions of the author of the website are also very apparent.

“Books About the Native Peoples of the Chesapeake Region”—a listing of books and articles compiled by scholars at the Smithsonian Institution—is available at <http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmai/chesapeake.htm>. Resources for researching and teaching about Native American cultures are also provided at <http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmai/start.htm>.

“Historic Fort Belvoir: Prehistoric Antecedents” and “Historic Fort Belvoir: Native Americans and Europeans” <http://www.belvoir.army.mil/history.asp?id=Antecedents> both provide some background into Native Americans living along the Potomac River, with a focus on the area around Belvoir in Virginia. These pages reference some archaeological studies performed in the region. There’s also an emphasis on the Dogue tribe (or group), who, along with the Patawomeke and Piscataway tribes, may have controlled the section of the Potomac River this guide is concerned with.

“Native Americans of the Area.” Arlington (Va.) Historical Society. [http://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/learn/snapshots/native\\_americans.asp](http://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/learn/snapshots/native_americans.asp) This page describes some Native American sites located in Arlington County, as well as Smith’s contact with the one of the Native American groups living there. The page describes European contact with the “Necostin” tribe.

### National Park Service Sites:

Piscataway Park (a unit of the National Park System). Accokeek, MD. Small boat dock and canoe/kayak launch. A Native American settlement is thought to have been located at this site; an ossuary and many artifacts have been uncovered and recorded. The site has also been the focus of controversy between the Park Service and the modern Native American community. Discussion of this site may serve as an introduction to the relationship between land and group identity.

<http://www.bayjournal.com/article.cfm?article=2666> An (November 2005) article on Piscataway Park from the Bay Journal, published by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay.

<http://www.nps.gov/pisc/> The National Park Service website for Piscataway Park.

Theodore Roosevelt Island Park (access via the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Mount Vernon Trail and/or Potomac Heritage Trail). According to the Arlington (Va.) Historical Society website, Roosevelt Island was once inhabited by the Necostin tribe

([http://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/learn/sites\\_properties/people.asp#necostin](http://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/learn/sites_properties/people.asp#necostin)). More information on the park may be found at <http://www.nps.gov/this/>. The Necostin tribe is acknowledged with a sign on site. There is a half-mile boardwalk that goes through the swamp forest, as well as 2.5 miles of other trails around the island.

### Related Sites/Tours:

Jones Point Park. "Jones Point Trek": Alexandria Archaeology Museum (approximately one mile from the Alexandria Archaeology Museum). Native American Sites and artifacts have been discovered on the original boot-shaped Point and south of Great Hunting Creek for a hundred years. Native populations lived here from about 9,200 to 500 years ago in seasonal camps while exploiting the rich marine resources. Their stone tools, debris from tool-making, ceramics and hearthstones are still preserved here. In 1608, Captain John Smith recorded the Powhatan Village of Assaomeck ("middle fishing place") on the southern terrace overlooking Great Hunting Creek, just south of Alexandria near today's Belle Haven Country Club (from <http://oha.ci.alexandria.va.us/archaeology/jonespoint/ar-jpt-index.html>). Also, many archaeological sites dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are located on Jones Point. The remains of Keith's Wharf, established in the 1780s, are acknowledged with historic markers along a river-front walkway.

### **Tobacco, Slavery, and the Potomac**

European settlement patterns in the Chesapeake region were shaped, in a large part, by tobacco. Tobacco is difficult to grow, labor-intensive, and depletes whatever land it is grown on of nutrients very quickly. A landholder who wished to grow tobacco needed a large amount of land and a large labor force if he wished to create a successful venture. Although plantations in the Chesapeake region tended to be smaller than those in other slave-holding areas, such as South Carolina, large enslaved populations eventually developed in Maryland and Virginia. Many plantations were established along the Potomac River as it served as a reliable avenue for commerce. Although the biggest plantations were, to an extent, self-sufficient, many goods were brought in and shipped out through the plantation's wharf. Daily necessities, luxury items, and items created by enslaved craftspeople could be bought and sold at urban centers. These goods would be transported on boats and barges on the river. Wharves at these plantations provided a vital link to the outside world.

### Resources:

Arnett, Earl. "Southern Maryland." Maryland Online Encyclopedia (<http://www.mdoe.org/southernmdovrvw.html>).

This article provides an overview of the history of Southern Maryland, focusing on changes in the character of the landscape. It gives a good general impression of development from the first Maryland settlers in 1637 to today. The article may also help to explain the patterns of plantation land ownership that were common in the Chesapeake region.

Morgan, Philip D. *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. University of North Carolina Press. 1998. Morgan examines the social and economic realities of plantation life, comparing the Chesapeake region with the South Carolina Lowcountry. A valuable, if lengthy, introduction to how plantation life and the plantation landscape was organized. It also examines the interaction between landowners and slaves.

*American Notes* by Charles Dickens, Chapters 8 and 9. <http://www.online-literature.com/dickens/americanotes/>

Chapter 8 describes Dickens' visit to Washington, with his impressions of the layout of the city and the manners and customs of the people who made Washington their home. Chapter 9 details a trip along the Potomac, some impressions of slavery, and a description of the effect of slavery on the Virginia landscape.

"Slave Pen in Alexandria" William R. Pywell. 1862. Reproduction number LC-B8171-2296 (4-2) (<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/04/0402001r.jpg>). An image of the Franklin and Armfield Slave Market. This most infamous establishment stood at 1315 Duke St. in Alexandria, Virginia. The main building, which housed offices, still stands today, and is home to the Northern Virginia Urban League.

More information on the role of enslaved peoples and free African-Americans in the region can be found in the Alexandria Archaeology Museum's exhibit "To Witness the Past: African American Archaeology in Alexandria, Virginia." Excerpts from the catalog are available online at <http://oha.alexandriava.gov/archaeology/ar-exhibits-witness.html>. The sections "Slavery in Alexandria" and "Working in Alexandria" explain some of the contributions of African Americans in trade, manufacturing, and everyday life in an urban setting. Other sections describe free neighborhoods and other sites of importance.

#### Related Sites/Tours:

Mount Vernon. Administered by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. Although Mount Vernon does not offer a public boat launch, two different commercial river cruises are available. For more information go to <http://www.mountvernon.org/visit/plan/index.cfm/pid/29/>

Mount Vernon offers many educational programs. These may be found online at [http://www.mountvernon.org/learn/meet\\_george/index.cfm/pid/567/](http://www.mountvernon.org/learn/meet_george/index.cfm/pid/567/). The "Down on the Farm" program (Grades 3-5 and 6-8) is especially noteworthy, as it focuses on economics and farming at Mount Vernon. The newly-reconstructed gristmill (three miles from the main Mount Vernon site) offers a chance to see some of the facilities that would have been used in creating products for plantation use and sale [http://www.mountvernon.org/learn/explore\\_mv/index.cfm/ss/32/](http://www.mountvernon.org/learn/explore_mv/index.cfm/ss/32/).

Old Town Alexandria—various sites. Marina/boat docking available at (Alexandria) City Marina. Contact Dockmaster at 703-838-4265. Sailboats (and sailing classes), canoes, and kayaks are available for rental at the Mariner Sailing School at Belle Haven Marina. Moorings and a boat launch are also available. Call 703-768-0018 for more information.

A walk around Old Town will uncover many pertinent sites, some of which are open to the public:

Alexandria's first sugar refinery, built in 1804 was located on the 100 block of North Alfred Street. Information on this site may be found at <http://oha.ci.alexandria.va.us/archaeology/ar-exhibits-witness-3.html>. By 1810, Alexandria had become the third largest source of refined sugar in the United States. Sugar (and rum) was one of the mainstays of "triangle trade," which also included trade in enslaved persons. The refineries in Alexandria operated with staffs that included slaves. The site was redeveloped, and is now home to a day spa.

Carlyle House. Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. "Don't Get Weary: African Americans in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Virginia" is a school tour that encourages students to think about the life of enslaved individuals. Carlyle House was built by a young Scottish merchant that immigrated to Virginia in 1741. Construction on the house was finished in 1753. Touring Carlyle House gives a look into the life of a successful urban merchant of the period ([www.carlylehouse.org](http://www.carlylehouse.org)).

"Black Historic Sites—Alexandria, Virginia" Walking Tour. Alexandria Black History Museum ([http://oha.alexandriava.gov/bhrc/bh-walking\\_tour.html](http://oha.alexandriava.gov/bhrc/bh-walking_tour.html)). A visit to many of the sites on the walking tour would help to encourage classroom discussion of the experiences of enslaved persons and free blacks in the Potomac region. Important sites include Market Square, Hayti, the Bottoms, and the Franklin and Armfield Slave Market.

*Gunston Hall Plantation.* The Commonwealth of Virginia and the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. The "Plantation World" tour (Grades 3-6) and "Land & Labor" tour (grades 7-12) provide insight into plantation living for both landowners and African Americans. Coordinators may be contacted at 703-550-9220 Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. or emailed at [education@gunstonhall.org](mailto:education@gunstonhall.org). The focus of your group's tour may also be customized. The "Of Land & Labor" booklet is available for purchase. The lesson plan "Discover George Mason: Home, State, and Country" is also available online <http://www.gunstonhall.org/discover/>. The section on "The Plantation Community" has some potential activities to teach younger students (grades 3-6) about interpreting landscapes and maps.



## **Industry on the Potomac: The Industrial Revolution and its Legacy**

Industry dramatically impacted the landscape of the Potomac River. During the Industrial Revolution of the early- to mid-1800s, factories sprang up along the shore to take advantage of easy access to trade routes and water. Unfortunately, many factories also released waste into the river. Combined with the waste runoff created by a sharp population increase in the area, industrial waste has been one of the greatest environmental threats to the health of the Potomac. Only recently, with new EPA guidelines and wastewater treatment facilities such as Blue Plains, has the Potomac begun to recover from the Industrial Revolution.

### **Resources:**

*River Farms to Urban Towers: Southwest Heritage Trail.* Cultural Tourism DC.

A booklet describing Cultural Tourism DC's walking tour of Southwest DC, with a particular emphasis on the changing landscape of the area. Southwest DC has experienced many transitions throughout history, from a river farm in the Colonial era to a bustling wharf and marketplace in the 1800s and 1900s. The "working-class, waterfront neighborhood" fell into disrepair in the 1950s, and in the 1960s was the focus of the nation's first urban-renewal project, becoming a "new town in the city".

[http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/usr\\_doc/SW\\_Heritage\\_Trail\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/usr_doc/SW_Heritage_Trail_brochure.pdf)

Naval Historical Center. Pictures of the Washington Navy Yard and shipbuilding facilities can be found at <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/pl-usa/pl-dc/wny/wash-nyd.htm>. The shipbuilding industry was rather important in the Potomac and Chesapeake regions, and the Navy still maintains large bases in the area.

Lippson, Alice Jane and Robert L. Lippson. *Life in the Chesapeake Bay.* 1997.

An overview of the diverse life in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Holds some information on the very important menhaden and shad fisheries of the region.

Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin. <http://www.potomacriver.org/>

The website of this interdisciplinary commission, established by Congress in 1940, provides a great deal of information on the history of the Potomac. Many restoration projects are described. Environmental information on watersheds, water quality, and more are also provided. The website links to other concerned organizations and community groups.

"Reducing and Preventing Toxics Pollution." Chesapeake Bay Program.

<http://www.chesapeakebay.net/toxics2.htm>

This page details the Toxics 2000 Strategy program and goals, as well as providing information on industrial pollution in general. It links to government guidelines and maps of impacted bodies of water, as well as university programs. A good starting point for a really in-depth look at industrial pollutants in the Bay and its tributaries.

"Environmental Kids Club." United States Environmental Protection Agency. <http://www.epa.gov/kids/>

This page contains multiple layers of information appropriate for students from elementary through high school. It provides a good background in the environmental challenges facing the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River system. The site also proposes numerous activities and experiments that can be done in the classroom to demonstrate environmental science concepts. The "Students" portal leads visitors to the EPA Student Center website, which provides educational information, links, and activities. The "Teachers" portal also provides curriculum resources, other information and links to other educational sites.

A series of pictures featuring one of the buildings of the Washington Navy Yard may be found in the American Memory Collection in the Library of Congress. It may be accessed through <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.dc0619>. Although completed as part of the Historic American Buildings

Survey, this collection includes a print and photographs from the 1860s as well as aerial views taken of the Navy Yard in the 1930s and 1940s.

The National Archives also holds some potentially valuable resources, including photographs of the Potomac River in a very polluted condition. These photos were mostly taken by individuals working for the Environmental Protection Agency. Go to the ARC Basic Search at

[http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/basic\\_search.jsp](http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/basic_search.jsp). Search for “Potomac”. Make sure to click that you want “Descriptions of Archival Materials linked to digital copies” and set a date range between 1960 and 2006. Select “All Locations.” For “Type of Archival Material,” select “Photographs and other Graphic Materials”. Examples of types of images found include “Raw Sewage Flowing into the Potomac at Georgetown Gap” [http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/arch\\_results\\_detail.jsp?&pg=12&si=0&st=b&rp=digital&nh=43](http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/arch_results_detail.jsp?&pg=12&si=0&st=b&rp=digital&nh=43) and “Fishing the Muddied Potomac Near Mt. Vernon”

[http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/arch\\_results\\_detail.jsp?&pg=43&si=0&st=b&rp=digital&nh=43](http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/arch_results_detail.jsp?&pg=43&si=0&st=b&rp=digital&nh=43). The ARC Basic Search can be used to obtain a number of digital images on all sorts of subjects pertinent to the Potomac River.



#### National Park Service Site:

Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. No boat ramp, but canoes/kayaks may be rented at Belle Haven Marina; call 703-768-0018 for more information. This is the largest remaining tidal/freshwater wetland in the Washington DC region. The National Park Service offers a program, “Stability through Diversity,” that teaches biodiversity and the ecosystem of the marsh. Part of the pre-visit activities includes lessons on the “History of Dyke Marsh,” which was impacted by industrial gravel dredging and the accumulation of heavy metal pollution from industries on

the Potomac. See <http://www.nps.gov/gwmp/pac/dyke/index.html> or call the “Parks as Classrooms” Coordinator at 703-289-2556 about tours.

#### Related Sites/Tours:

Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Plant. 5000 Overlook Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20032. Visitors must be 12 years or older. A tour of the facility can be scheduled using the form at: [http://www.dcwasa.com/about/tour\\_request\\_form.cfm](http://www.dcwasa.com/about/tour_request_form.cfm). A tour of the wastewater treatment facility would be a memorable way to emphasize the interaction between people and the environment. A discussion of the history of Blue Plains would also highlight the effect development and local population increase has had on the river. A virtual tour is also available at: [http://www.dcwasa.com/about/model\\_flash.cfm](http://www.dcwasa.com/about/model_flash.cfm).

Hard Bargain Farm. Alice Ferguson Foundation. Not open to the general public; must make a pre-scheduled appointment for your class. An outdoor environmental education center that provides various day and overnight programs. Educational programs here also fulfill the “Meaningful Bay Experience” requirement of the Chesapeake Bay 2000 Agreement. Topics covered include point and non-point sources of pollution, species diversity, and local wildlife. Contact at 301-292-5665 or [webmail@fergusonfoundation.org](mailto:webmail@fergusonfoundation.org).

Maine Avenue Fish Market. Maine Ave. SE. Washington, DC. A fantastic and dynamic public space that shows the continuing relationship between people and the River/Chesapeake Bay. A very multi-sensory experience, as it is a functioning fish-market. This site holds potential for both social studies/history lessons (e.g. watermen and the fishing industries of the region) or environmental lessons (e.g. identifying species of fish, geographic origins of various fish). Descriptions available at:

[www.pps.org/gps/one?public\\_place\\_id=220](http://www.pps.org/gps/one?public_place_id=220) and  
<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0207/feature7/index.html?fs=www7.nationalgeographic.com>.

Southwest Heritage Trail. Cultural Tourism DC. The tour sites along Water Street, in particular, provide a look into the changing character of the neighborhood and its relationship to the Potomac River. A guide booklet, map, and more information are available at  
[http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/information2546/information\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=253635](http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/information2546/information_show.htm?doc_id=253635).

U.S. Navy Museum. Navy Yard, Washington, DC. Visitors (and groups) without DOD/military identification must call 202-433-6897 to make an appointment. (<http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/org8-1.htm>)

Housed in the old Naval Gun Factory, the museum explores the role the Navy has played in many of the United States' armed conflicts. They offer the program "Ships to Sea" (for grades 2 through 4) that introduces children to the various types of naval ships and naval terminology. The program may be found at <http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/teach/ships/ships1.htm>. A visit to the Museum should be combined with an exploration of the photographs of the Navy Yard in its heyday so that students may get an impression of how large and industrial the shipbuilding and gun factory works really were.

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by **Cassie Mancer**  
**The Accokeek Foundation at Piscataway Park**  
for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Office, National Park Service  
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More information: Donald E. Briggs, Superintendent  
Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail  
National Park Service  
[don\\_briggs@nps.gov](mailto:don_briggs@nps.gov) & 304-535-4016